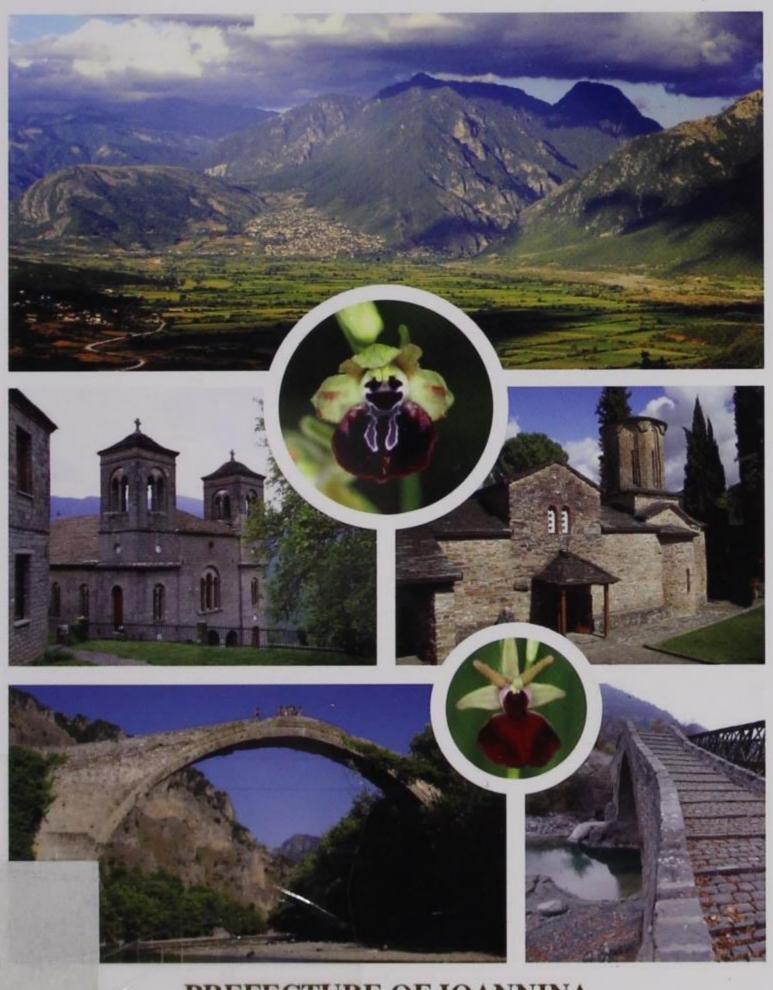
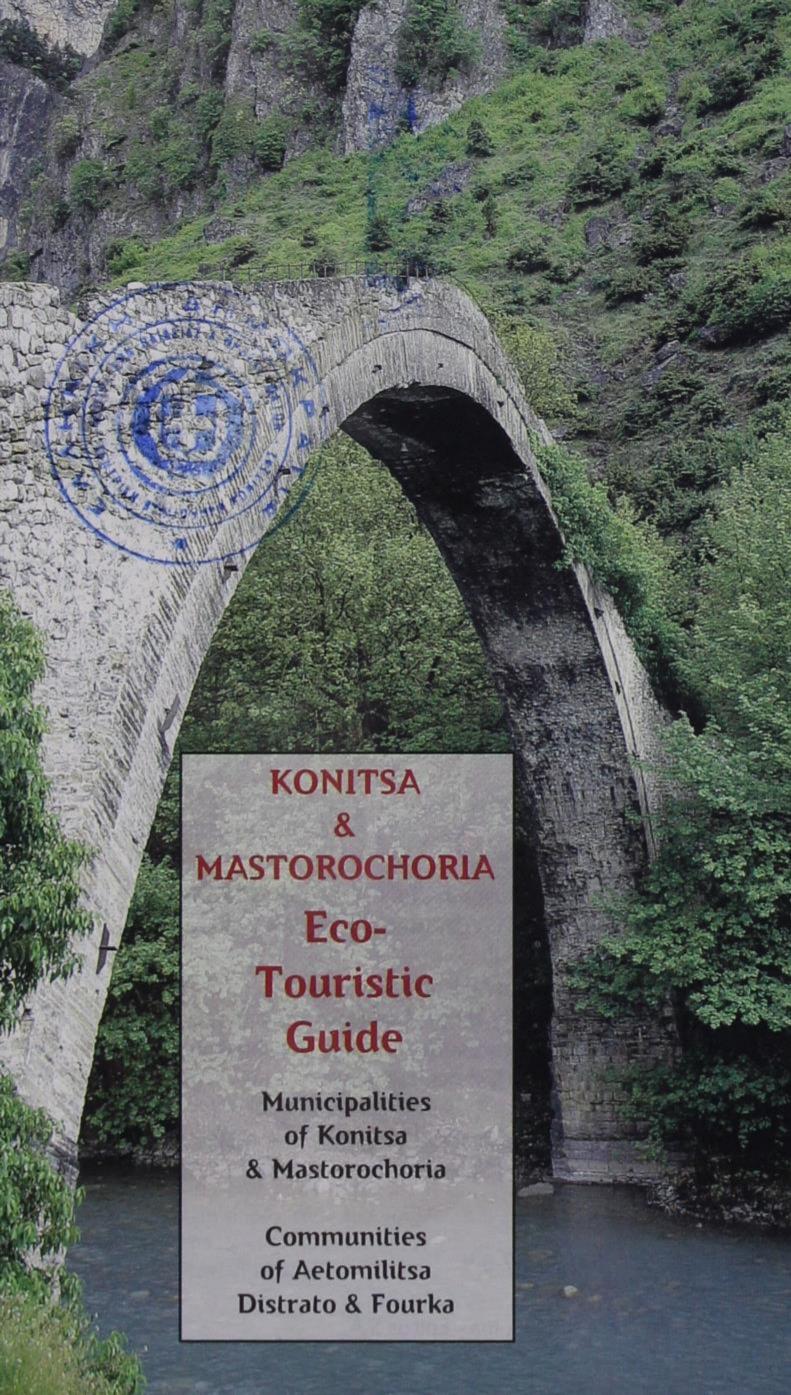
Ecotouristic Guide KONITSA & MASTOROHORIA



PREFECTURE OF IOANNINA EPIRUS S.A.

Ioannina 2008



PREFECTURE OF IOANNINA EPIRUS S.A.

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Translation in english: Sandra Coles (chapters: 4,5,6) Michael Sifakis (chapters: 1,2,3,7)

ISBN: 978-960-98737-8-9

Prefecture of Ioannina - Epirus S.A.

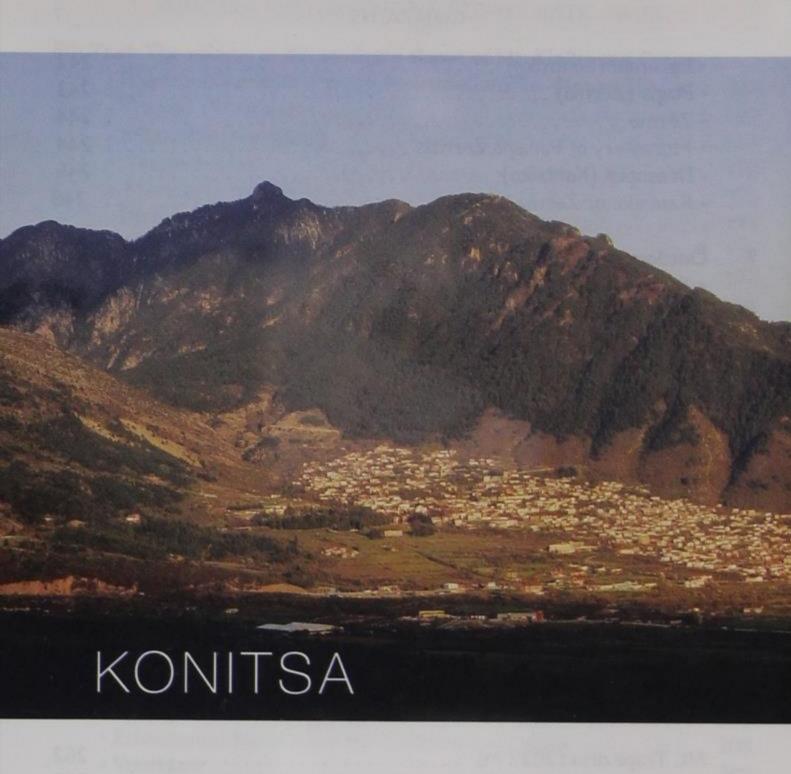
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The present edition is part of the project Documentation, publicizing and advancement of the natural beauty and cultural legacy of the Konitsa province, which was carried out by the company «ANAPTYKSIAKI EPIROU SA – Anaptyksiaki Anonimi etairia OTA» (heads of project Haritakis Papaioannou and Gerasimos Papailias) on behalf of the Prefecture of Ioannina and is included in the "Anaptiksiako Programa Eprarhias Konitsas" (EAPEK) (Special developmental project of the Konitsa province) – Ministry of Economy and Finance – Public investement program.



Introduction

Magnificent mountains, impressive gorges, polymorphous geological formations, extensive dense forests, rapid rivers and amidst all these, the picturesque town of Konitsa and its plain as well as the numerous villages on the slopes of Northern Pindos, compose the geographical and cultural unity of the wider area of Konitsa.

Mt. Grammos is the natural

border of the wider area of Konitsa to the northwest with the Prefecture of Kastoria and the neighboring country, Albania. Mt. Smolikas, Greece's second highest mountain, towers above the center and to the east, while a little further lies Mt. Vassilitsa. dividing the Prefecture of Ioannina in Epirus from the Prefecture of Grevena in Western Macedonia. The majestic Aoos gorge, formed between forested Mt. Trapezitsa and precipitous Mt. Tymphi to the southeast, is the natural border of the area of Konitsa with the

neighboring area of Zagori. Finally, to the south stand the imposing Mt. Nemertsika and Mt. Dousko, separating Konitsa from Pogoni and neighboring Albania.

The rapid waters of three rivers with their several tributaries run between the beautiful, but also rough mountains of Konitsa. Aoos, Voidomatis and Sarandaporos merge in the plain of Konitsa and the surrounding villages. Thereafter as one river, Aoos, their water flows to the coast of the Adriatic Sea through Albania.

The diversity of the natural environment of the wider area of Konitsa is clearly reflected in the characteristics and the habits of the people who have been living here since ancient times. A mosaic of 47 settlements, divided into 41 municipal and communal sections, belongs to two municipalities (Konitsa & Mastorochoria) and three communities (Aetomilitsa, Distrato & Fourka).

The wider area of Konitsa, which until recently constituted a county, is composed by four distinct cultural unities, with their own special characteristics. To the south, the town of Konitsa and the

villages around the plain, to the east the villages of the Aoos valley, to the northeast the Mastorochoria villages and up on the higher altitude zone of the mountains, the Vlachochoria villages.

The incomparable and rich natural environment, the picturesque settlements, the interspersed monuments, the openhearted people and the rich culture and tradition in all its expressions have established the

wider area of Konitsa as one of the most popular destinations for Greek and foreign travelers.

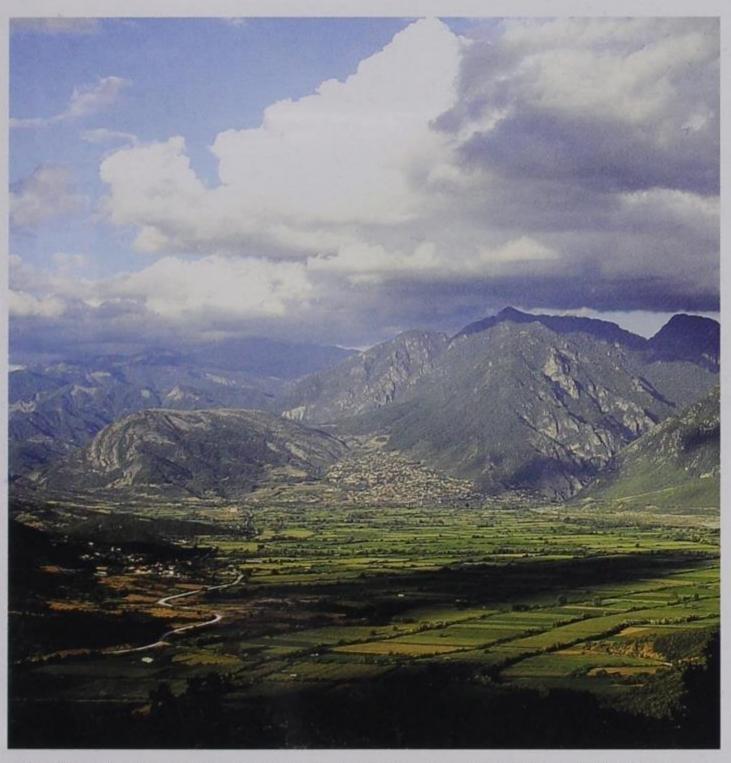
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guide aims to provide you with all the information you need in order to tour the villages and the mountains of the wider area of Konitsa, ensuring that your trip is pleasant, satisfying and instructive. We hope that this book will accompany you during the beautiful and creative moments that you will spend in the charming area of Konitsa and the surrounding villages.

This

We wish you a pleasant stay and a wonderful tour.

1. The landscape and the villages



Konitsa is located at the place where the plain meets the foothills of Mt. Trapezitsa



The wider area of Konitsa covers an area of 1.000 km2 at the northern part of the Prefecture of Ioannina. Concerning geomorphology, there is a strong geological relief ranging from an altitude of 375m at the lower parts of the Konitsa plain to more than 2000m at the high mountains. However, the sub-alpine plateau and the high peaks usually exceed this altitude, as is the case, for instance, with Mt (2520m) and Mt. Grammos Smolikas (2637m), the second highest mountain in Greece.

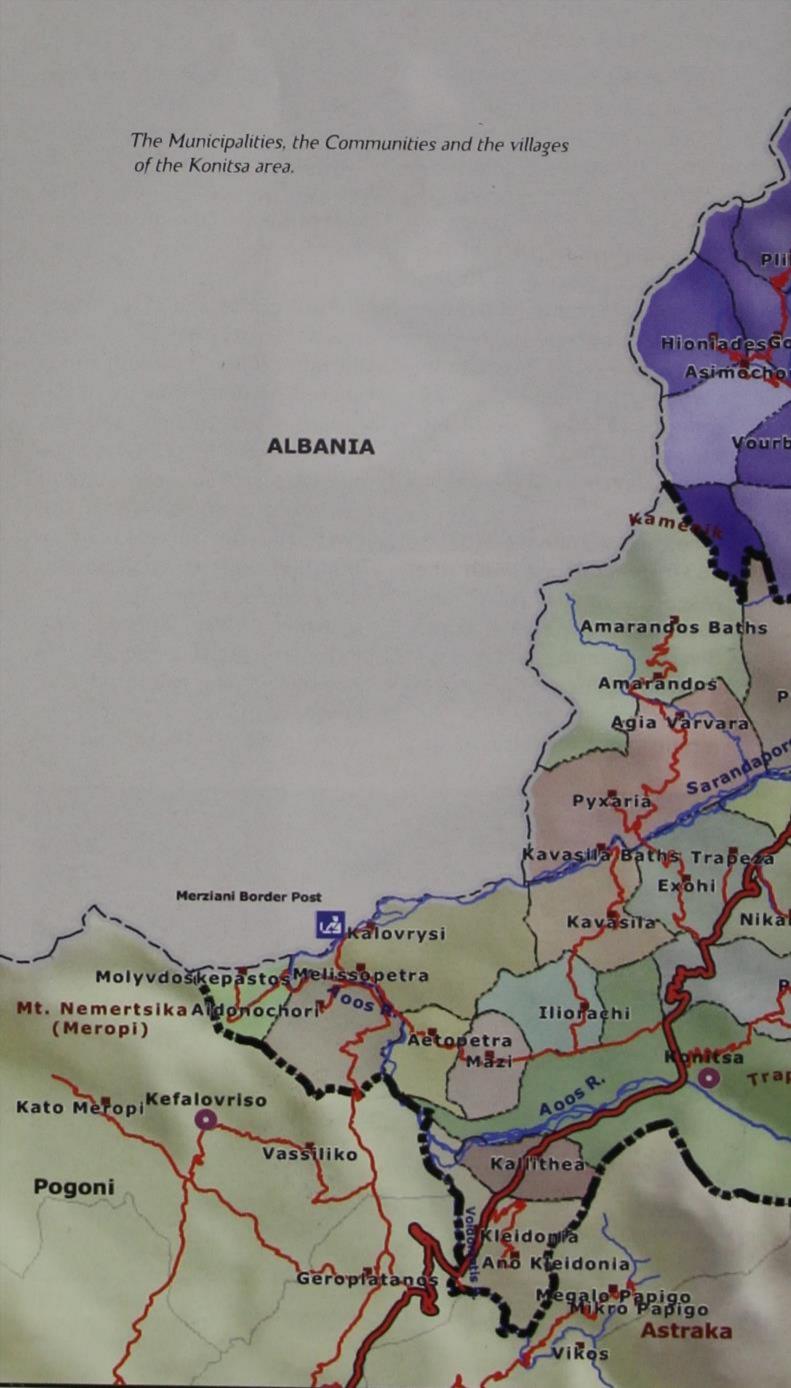
The wide altitude scale (375m – 2637m) combined with the intense geographic relief and geological substrate creates slopes of diverse exposure and incline, characterized by local microclimate variations, which are in turn reflected in the flora. All the

mountains of the area have steep slopes. There are a few gentler slopes as well, where the cultivated land of the several villages is located. Plains exist only in the basin of Konitsa and the surrounding villages.

Most of the land of the wider area of Konitsa lies at medium altitudes (700m - 1600m) and is covered by dense forests of deciduous trees (mainly oak and beech) and conifers (fir and black pine). A significant percentage of the whole area, located at the lower altitude zone (375m -700m), is covered by deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs (strawberry tree, kermes oak, smoke tree etc.). At this altitude zone there is also cultivated land. though today it is restricted mainly in the plain of Konitsa and the



Mt. Grammos, Gorgopotamos valley





surrounding villages. Sub-alpine pastures, as well as steep rocky cliffs exist at the high altitude zone (1600m— 2600m). An exception to the absence of trees in high altitudes is the Balkan pine, known as "rombolo" in Greek. It is a hardy coniferous tree that can withstand the adverse conditions of higher altitudes and is often found in clusters of age-old trees at altitudes up to 2000m.

The administration of the wider area of Konitsa is divided into two municipalities and three communities.

Konitsa is the largest municipality with 6.217 inhabitants and 25 municipal departments, comprising 29 settlements listed below:

Agia Varvara (Plavali), Agia Paraskevi (Kerasovo), Aetopetra (Sanovo), Aidonochori (Ostanitsa), Amarandos (Isvoro) & Loutra Amarandou, Armata (Armatovo), Ganadio, Elefthero (Grizbani), Exochi (Zelista), Iliorachi (Koutsoufliani), Kavassila, Kalithea (Goritsa), Kalovrisi (Pirovitska), Kleidonia (Kalivia) & Ano Kleidonia (Kleidoniaousta or Litoniavista), Mazi, Melissopetra, Molista (Messaria), Molyvdoskepastos (Dipalitsa), Monastiri (Botsifari), Nikanoras (Kortinista), Pades, Palioseli, Pigi (Peklari), Pixaria (Blithouki), Pirgos (Stratsiani), Pournia (Staritsiani) and Trapeza (Vranista).

The municipality of Mastorochoria has 2.076 inhabitants and 13 municipal departments which correspond to 15 settlements: Assimochori (Leskatsi), Vourbiani, Gorgopotamos (Tournovo), Drossopigi (Kantsiko), Theotokos (Fetoko), Kastanea (Kastaniani), Kefalochori, Lagada (Blizdiani), Likorachi (Loupsiko), Plagia & Zerma, Plikati, Pirsogianni, Oxia (Seltsi) and Chioniades.

Apart from the municipalities, in the wider area of Konitsa three communities are also included: Aetomilitsa (Denisko) with 306 inhabitants, Fourka with 208 inhabitants and Distrato (Briaza) with 490 inhabitants.



1.1. The mountains

Mt. Grammos

In the northernmost part of the wider area of Konitsa spreads a large section of Mt. Grammos. This imposing mountain belongs both to Greece and Albania. On the Greek side, it belongs to the Prefectures of Ioannina and Kastoria, and on the Albanian side to the areas of Erseka. Koritsa and Premeti. The wider area of Konitsa contains the high peaks, which more or less constitute the borders of the above mentioned administrative units, as well as the southern slopes. Grammos is the fourth highest mountain in Greece and its highest peak reaches 2520m. Within the wider area of Konitsa, Mt. Grammos forms a horseshoe shaped crest with the



Mt. Grammos (2520m)

highest peaks at the top: Grammos (or Tsouka Petsik) (2520m), Perifano (or Skirtsi) (2444m) and Kiafa (2395m). From there eastwards extends the ridge that divides geographically and administratively the Prefectures of Ioannina and Kastoria. In this direction and from higher altitudes



Sheep flock at the sub alpines grasslands on Mt. Grammos

to lower, appear the following main peaks: Souflikas (2149m), Epano Arena (2196m), Kato Arena (2089m) and Bouchtetsi (1698m).

On the other side of the horseshoe, to the southwest, extends the crest that has been the borderline between Greece and Albania since 1914. Its main peaks are Mavri Petra (2431m), anonymous (2256m), Rosdoli (1965m), anonymous (2163m), anonymous (2126m), Lessili (1913m), Vartzioban (1623m), Golio (1919m), Kardari (1955m), Kamenik (2042m) and Maria (1637m). Between the two main crests of the horseshoe, there is a third smaller one, which forms the peaks Gessos (2163m), Stavros (1919m) and Profitis Ilias (1518m) and subsequently dissolves in the riverbed of Sarandaporos.

In regard to geology, flysch is the dominant geological substrate, impressive while calcareous formations exist in several locations, such as Epano and Kato Arena, Kamenik, Petra Mouka e.a. In addition, tertiary sediments from the last ice age are found in several sites. Rapid torrents, such as Pistilapi, Avgeris and Gorgopotamos spring here. They flow more or less south in the wider area of Konitsa ending up at the Sarandaporos riverbed.

Fourteen settlements are located on the slopes of Mt. Grammos. Ten of them belong to the

municipality of Mastorochoria, whereas other three on the southwest side to the municipality of Konitsa and one is an independent community.

Mt. Smolikas

Over the central and southeast parts of the wider area of Konitsa towers the impressive Mt. Smolikas, Greece's second highest mountain. Its higher peaks are "Smolikas" (2637m) & "Moasia" (2610m). The main part of this massif belongs to the wider area of



Konitsa, whereas a small part at the nortwest belongs to the Pref. of Grevena.

Starting from the typical cone of the highest peak, an extended crest goes to the west and after crossing the locations "Missorachi" and "Daliopoli", ends at Kleftis peak (1847m). The streams that flow down the northern and western slopes of this elongated crest are tributaries of either Sarandaporos or Vourkopotamos river, while the rest of them on the eastern slopes go directly to Aoos river. On the southeast side,



Dragonlake (Drakolimni) and the highest summit of Mt. Smolikas (2637m)

another crest passes by the locations of "Smiliano" and "Epta vrisses" (Seven fountains) to end at "Tsouma" peak (1876m), while to the northeast, at the border with the Pref. of Grevena, the peaks "Bogdani" (2236m), "Captain Tsekouras" (2216m) and "Vouzi" (1758m) are located. A part of the mountain, starting from Bogdani, extends to the northwest, forming Mt. Tabouri with the peaks "Profitis Ilias" (1716m), "Ochiron" or "Tabouri" (1871m) and "Giftissa"(1750m). Other peaks worth mentioning are "Mougourida" (2100m) and "Alogotopos" (or Tsouma Kalioro) (2213m).

Regarding geology, ophiolite is dominant and then comes flysch, while there are a few limited locations with limestone formations. Rapid small rivers, torrents and streams, like Vathilakos, Vourkopotamos, Topolitsa, Aspropotamos, Milopotamos and Briaza, flow at the slopes of Smolikas and its branches. All of them join the main rivers further down: Sarandaporos and Aoos.

On the slopes of Mt. Smolikas and its branches (Kleftis, Tabouri, Giftissa) there are 17 villages. Most of them (13) belong to the municipality of Konitsa, few (3), located on the northern side, to the municipality of Mastorochoria and one, Fourka, is an independent community.

Mt. Vassilitsa

Mt. Vassilitsa stands east of Mt. Smolikas. It belongs to both the Pref. of Ioannina and Grevena. The Vassilitsa National Ski Center is located between its highest peaks, "Vassilitsa" (2248m) and "Gomara" (2126m).

Concerning geology, ophiolite is the main geological bedrock and then comes flysch. The streams that flow down the western slopes of this mountain join the waters of the Samariniotiko or Briaza river, which then shortly merge with Aoos river.

On the west slopes of Mt. Vassilitsa there is only one settlement, Distrato, which is an independent community.

Mt. Tymfi & Mt. Trapezitsa

Mt. Tymfi is located to the south of the wider area of Konitsa



Mt. Vassilitsa (2249m)

and on the border with the area of Zagori. Its highest peak is "Gamila" (2497m). The western side of this mountain, which comprises the steep slopes of "Ploskos" (2377m), "Drakolimni" (2080m), "Lapatos" (or Lazaros) (2254m) and "Tsouka Koula" (1529m) peaks, belongs to the wider area of Konitsa. Between the northern side of Mt.

Aoos valley ends at the Aoos gorge, which is formed by the slopes of Mt. Tymfi and Mt. Trapezitsa





Mt. Trapezitsa (2024m)

Tymfi, and Mt. Smolikas there is a lower mountain, but equally imposing, rocky, precipitous and densely forested, Mt. Trapezitsa. Three are the main peaks of this mountain: Trapezitsa (2024m) at the centre, "Kolokithia" (1850m) to the north and "Roidovouni" (1985m) to the southeast.

The southern slopes of Mt. Trapezitsa and the northwestern slopes of Mt. Tymfi form the scenic Aoos gorge. In addition, the southwest side of Mt. Tymfi and the opposing mountains of Zagori form the spectacular Vikos and Voidomatis gorge.

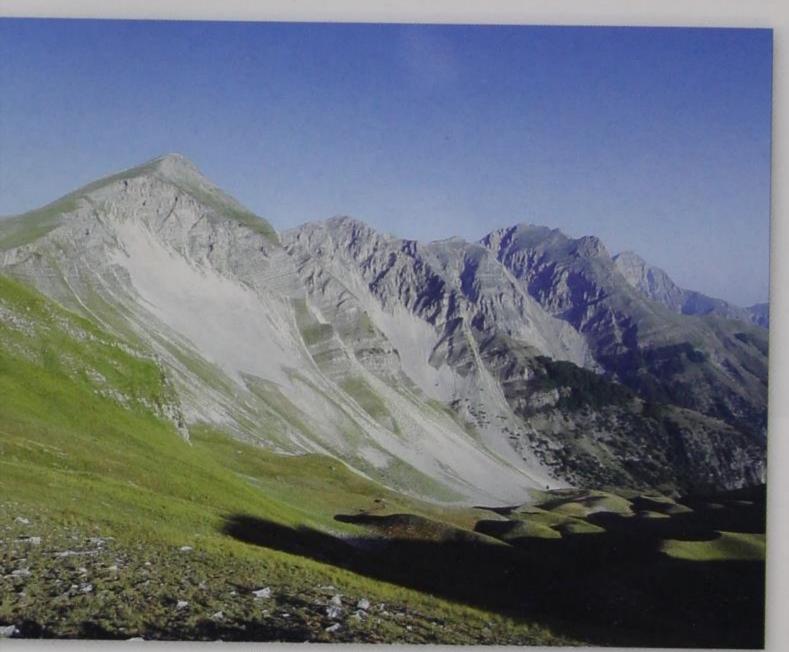
Both Tymfi and Trapezitsa are calcareous mountains, with occa-

sional formations of flysch, mostly in lower altitudes. There are only a few streams, which flow directly into Aoos river, with the exception of those that end into Voidomatis gorge.

The town of Konitsa and the village of Pigi are built at the foothill of Mt. Trapezitsa, while three villages of the municipality of Konitsa are located at Tymfi's western edges: Kallithea, Kleidonia and Ano Kleidonia.

Mt. Nemertsika & Mt. Dousko

The northern slopes of another extensive rocky massif, Mt. Nemertsika, come down into the



Mt. Nemertsika (Meropi peak, 2209m)

of Konitsa. Several magnificent peaks, ranging from 2000 to 2500m come after one to the other. "Papingut" peak (2486m) is the highest in the Albanian territory, whereas Meropi peak (2207m), at the easternmost point of the mountain, belongs half to Greece and half to Albania.

A part of this mountain extending to the east forms the densely forested Mt. Dousko (1168 m). Its northern slopes end in Aoos river and belong to the wider area of Konitsa, while the southern slopes belong to the area of Pogoni.

Limestone is dominant in Ne-

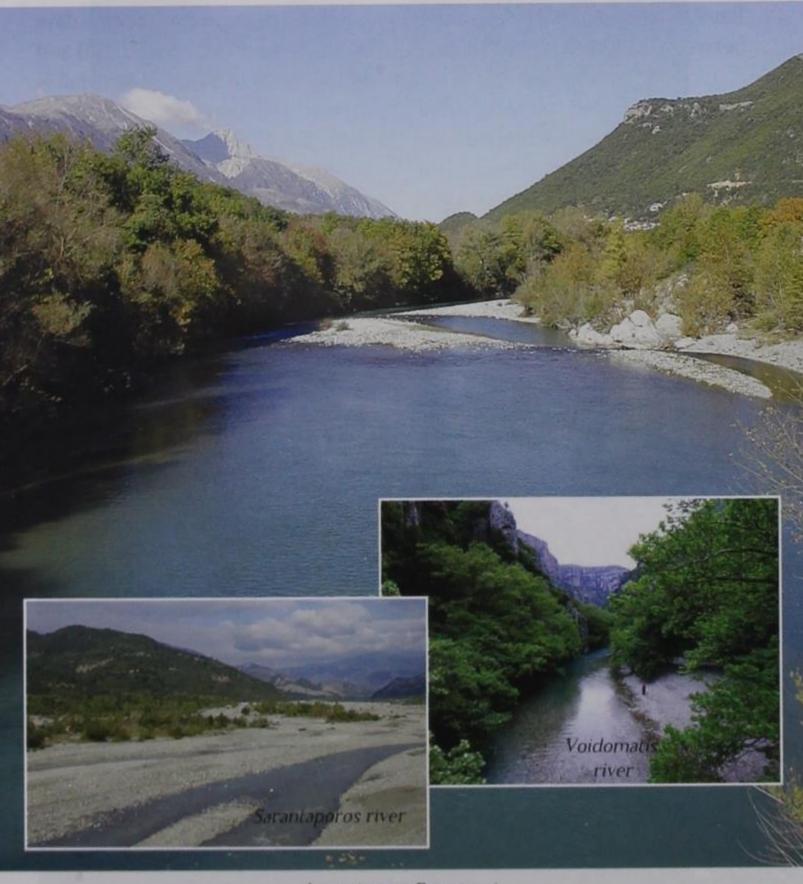
mertsika, and then comes flysch, while the opposite is the case in Dousko. The few seasonal streams on the slopes of these mountains facing the plain of Konitsa and the surrounding villages flow straight into Aoos river. Two villages (Aidonochori and Molivdoskepastos) of the municipality of Konitsa are located on the slopes of these mountains.

1.2 The rivers

Aoos, Sarandaporos and Voidomatis are the main rivers of the wider area of Konitsa. The villages of the Aoos valley are shared equally between Konitsa and the neighboring area of Zagori. Mts

Smolikas, Vassilitsa and Trapezitsa stand at the northern side of the valley, whereas Mts Tymfi, Flabouro and Peristeri on the southern side. Aoos springs on the slopes of Mts Augo, Zygos and Maurovouni, then flows a distance of 70 km up to the Greek-Albanian borderline. Then it crosses another 200 km in the territory of the neighboring country, up to its estuaries in the Adriatic sea.

Voidomatis' main springs are located at central west Zagori and at the famous Vikos gorge. As it flows further it forms the pretty Voidomatis gorge. Then it comes in the Konitsa area, where it joins Aoos river. Sarandaporos wipes up several streams and torrents from the two highest mountains of the area, Mt. Grammos and Mt. Smolikas, until the border with Albania where it joins Aoos, too.



Aoos river at Bourazani

1.3 Climate

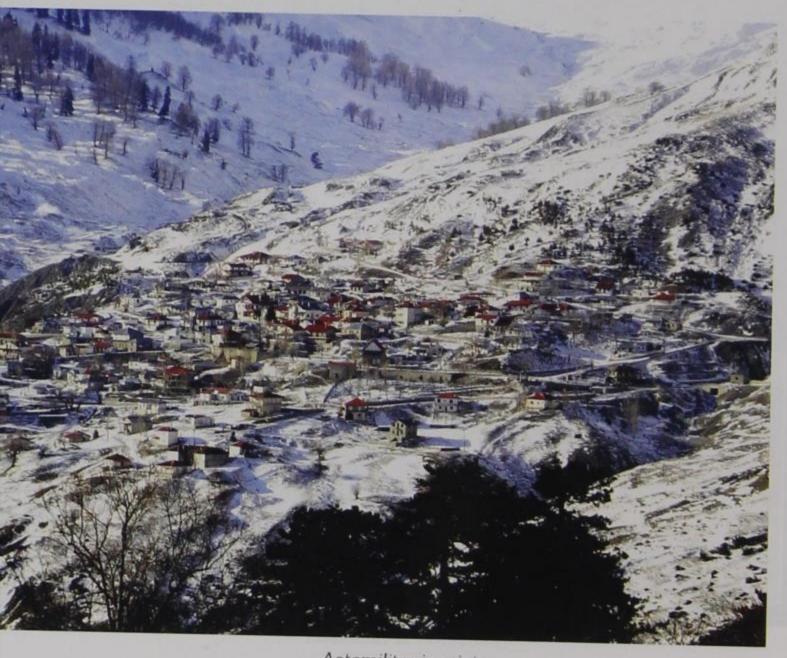
The climate at the lower altitude zone (500- 1000m), where almost all settlements are located, is of the continental climate type, with characteristics between the Mediterranean and Middle European climate types. Cold winters with many rains and warm, dry summers are typical for this climate type. Winter is extended; spring is usually short, summer hot and autumn seems to be long. Rainfall on an annual basis ranges between 1000mm to 1200mm.

At the higher altitude zone, where only few settlements are located, the climate belongs to the mountain type and higher up it

approaches the characteristics of the Middle European climate type. Winter is rough with heavy rains and snowfall.

Snow covers the earth for long periods in altitudes higher than 1500m, whereas higher than 1800m it covers the earth all winter and most of the spring. Summer is cool with light rains locally. Rainfall and snowfall annually range between 1200mm and 1400mm.

The total number of rainy days annually does not exceed 120 and in the town of Konitsa snowfall is limited to about ten days every year. July is the driest month and most rains fall in November, December and January.



Aetomilitsa in winter